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Soviet "Active Measures"

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Forgery, Disinformation, Political Operations

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The following paper was prepared by the Department of State in response to requests for information from a number of individuals, private groups, and foreign governments.

In late 1979, agents of the Soviet Union spread a false rumor that the United States was responsible for the seizure of the Grand Mosque of Mecca.

In 1980, a French journalist was convicted by a French court of law for acting as a Soviet agent of influence since 1959.

In August 1981, the Soviet news agency TASS alleged that the United States was behind the death of Panamanian leader Omar Torrijos.

These are three examples of a stream of Soviet "active measures" that seek to discredit and weaken the United States and other nations. The Soviets use the bland term "active measures" (*aktivnyye meropriyatiya*) to refer to operations intended to affect other nations' policies, as distinct from espionage and counterintelligence. Soviet "active measures" include:

- Written or spoken disinformation;
- Efforts to control media in foreign countries;
- Use of Communist parties and front organizations;
- Clandestine radio broadcasting;
- Blackmail, personal and economic; and
- Political influence operations.

None of this is to be mistaken for the open, accepted public diplomacy in which virtually all nations engage extensively. Public diplomacy includes providing press releases and other information to journalists, open public broadcasting, and a wide variety of official, academic, and cultural exchange programs. By contrast, Soviet "active measures" are frequently undertaken secretly, sometimes violate the laws of other nations, and often involve threats, blackmail, bribes, and exploitation of individuals and groups.

Soviet "active measures" do not always achieve Moscow's objectives. In some cases, Soviet operations have failed because of ineptitude or because targeted individuals or governments have responded effectively. However, Soviet "active measures" have had some success, and they remain a major, if little understood, element of Soviet foreign policy.

The approaches used by Moscow include control of the press in foreign countries; outright and partial forgery of documents; use of rumors, insinuation, altered facts, and lies; use of international and local front organizations; clandestine operation of radio stations; exploitation of a nation's academic, political, economic, and media figures as collaborators to influence policies of the nation.

Specific cases of Soviet "active measures" included here are: the Soviet anti-theater nuclear force (TNF) campaign in Europe; the Soviet anti-"neutron bomb" campaign; Soviet activities in support of the leftists in El Salvador; the Soviet campaign against the U.S.-Egypt relationship and the Camp David process.

"Active measures" are closely integrated with legitimate activities and Soviet foreign policy. Decisions on "active measures" in foreign countries are made at the highest level of authority in the U.S.S.R.—in the Politburo of the Communist Party Central Committee—as are all other important decisions of Soviet foreign policy.

The activities are designed and executed by a large and complex bureaucracy in which the KGB and the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Central Committee are major elements. The International Information Department of the CPSU Central Committee is also deeply engaged in such activities. Actual operations abroad are carried out by official and quasi-official Soviet representatives, including scholars, students, and journalists, whose official Soviet links are not always apparent. The highly centralized structure of the Soviet state and the state's pervasive control and direction of all elements of society give Soviet leaders impressive free use of party, government, and private citizens in orchestrating "active measures."

The open societies of the industrial democracies and many developing nations, and the ease of access to their news media, often give Soviets open season for "active measures." Many Western and developing countries ignore or downplay Soviet "active measures" until Soviet blunders lead to well-publicized expulsions of diplomats, journalists, or others involved in these activities. The Soviets are adept at making their policies appear to be compatible or parallel with the interests of peace, environmental, and other groups active in Western and developing societies.

By contrast, the Soviet Union denies access to its mass media for foreigners who might criticize Soviet society or the foreign policies of the U.S.S.R.

While the United States remains the primary target, Moscow is devoting increasing resources to "active measures" against the governments of other industrialized countries and countries in the developing world. Moscow seeks to disrupt relations between states, discredit opponents of the U.S.S.R., and undermine foreign leaders, institutions, and values. Soviet tactics adjust to changes in international situations but continue, and in some cases intensify, during periods of reduced tensions.

"Active Measures" Techniques

The tactics and emphasis of Soviet "active measures" change to meet changed situations. For instance, Soviet use of Marxist-Leninist ideology to appeal to foreign groups often turns out to be an obstacle to the promotion of Soviet goals in some areas; it is now being deem-

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phasized though not completely abandoned. At the same time, some religious themes—notably the Soviet assertion that the Islamic religion occupies a favorable position in the U.S.S.R.—have assumed greater significance, as Moscow courts Islamic countries in Africa and the Middle East.

Similarly, while Soviet-dominated international front groups still are important in Soviet "active measures" abroad, Moscow is broadening its base of support by using more single-interest groups and fronts formed for particular purposes to promote its goals.

Soviet "active measures" involve a mix of ingenious and crude techniques. A brief sample of types of activities includes the following.

Efforts to Manipulate the Press in Foreign Countries. Soviet agents frequently insert falsely attributed press material into the media of foreign countries. In one developing country, Soviets used more than two dozen local journalists to plant media items favorable to the U.S.S.R. Soviets have also used the Indian news weekly *Blitz* to publish forgeries, falsely accuse Americans of being CIA personnel or agents, and disseminate Soviet-inspired documents. In another country, the Soviets used local journalists to exercise substantial control over the contents of two major daily newspapers.

Forgeries. Soviet forgeries—completely fabricated or altered versions of actual documents—are produced and circulated to mislead foreign governments, media, and public opinion. Recent Soviet forgeries are better and appear more frequently than in the past. Among forgeries that Soviet agents have produced and distributed are bogus U.S. military manuals and fabricated war plans designed to create tensions between the United States and other countries. In some cases, the Soviets used actual documents passed to the KGB by U.S. Army Sergeant Robert Lee Johnson (who was eventually arrested and convicted as a Soviet agent) as models for style and format in Soviet forgeries. In one case, Soviet agents, seeking to disrupt NATO theater nuclear force modernization, circulated a forged "top secret" letter from Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to another Western foreign minister.

Disinformation. Soviet agents use rumor, insinuation, and distortion of facts to discredit foreign governments and leaders. In late 1979, Soviet agents spread a false rumor that the United States was behind the seizure of the Grand Mosque of Mecca. In another case, Soviet officials "warned" officials of a West European country that the CIA had increased its activities in the country and that a coup was being planned. Sometimes these disinformation campaigns appear in foreign media suborned by the Soviets, enabling Moscow to cite foreign sources for some of the distortions and misstatements that often appear in the Soviet media. A recent and particularly egregious example was the August 1981 TASS allegation that the United States was behind the death of Panamanian General Omar Torrijos.

Control of International and Local Front Organizations. Moscow controls pro-Soviet international front organizations through the International Organizations Section of the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee. Front organizations are more effective than openly pro-Soviet groups because they can attract members from a broad political spectrum. Prominent among these fronts are the World Peace Council, the World Federation of Trade Unions, the World Federation of Democratic Youth, and the Women's International Democratic Federation. Moscow's agents use Soviet "friendship" and cultural societies in many countries to contact people who would not participate in avowedly pro-Soviet or Communist organizations. The function of front, "friendship," and cultural groups is to support Soviet goals and to oppose policies and leaders whose activities do not serve Soviet interests.

To complement organizations known for pro-Soviet bias, the Soviets sometimes help establish and fund ad hoc front groups that do not have histories of close association with the Soviet Union and can attract members from a wide political spectrum.

Clandestine Radio Stations. The Soviet Union operates two clandestine radio stations: the National Voice of Iran (NVOI) and Radio Ba Yi, which broadcast regularly from the Soviet Union to Iran and China. Moscow has never publicly acknowledged that it sponsors the stations, which represent themselves as organs of authentic local "progressive" forces. The broadcasts of both of these Soviet stations illustrate the use of "active measures" in support of Soviet foreign policy goals. For instance, NVOI broadcasts to Iran in 1979–80 consistently urged that the American diplomatic hostages not be released, while Soviet official statements supported the hostages' claim to diplomatic immunity.

Economic Manipulation. The Soviet Union also uses a variety of covert economic maneuvers in "active measures" operations. For example, a Soviet ambassador in a West European country warned a local businessman that his sales to the U.S.S.R. would suffer if he went ahead with plans to provide technical assistance to China. In another industrialized country, Soviet agents sought to increase local concern over the stability of the dollar by driving up the price of gold. This was to be accomplished by manipulating a flow of both true and false information to local businessmen and government leaders. The gambit failed because the Soviet officials who attempted to carry it out did not fully understand the financial aspects of the operation.

Political Influence Operations. Political influence operations are the most important but least understood aspect of Soviet "active measures" activities. These operations seek to exploit contacts with political, economic, and media figures in target countries to secure active collaboration with Moscow. In return for this collaboration, Soviet officials offer inducements tailored to the specific requirements or vulnerabilities of the individual involved. In 1980, Pierre-Charles Pathe, a French journalist, was convicted for acting as a Soviet agent of influence since 1959. His articles—all subtly pushing the Soviet line on a wide range of international issues—were published in a number of important newspapers and journals, sometimes under the pseudonym of Charles Morand. The journalist also published a private newsletter which was regularly sent to many newspapers, members of parliament, and a number of foreign embassies. The Soviets used Pathe over a number of years to try to influence the attitudes of the prominent subscribers to his newsletter and to exploit his broad personal contacts.

In other cases, Soviet officials establish close relationships with political figures in foreign countries and seek to use these contacts in "active measures" operations. Capitalizing on the host government official's ambition, his Soviet contact claims to be a private channel to the Soviet leadership. To play upon his sense of self-importance and to enhance his credibility within his own government, the host government official may be invited to meetings with high-level Soviet leaders. The Soviets then exploit the local official to pass a mixture of true, distorted, and false information—all calculated to serve Soviet objectives—to the host government.

Use of Academicians and Journalists. Soviet academicians, who often are accepted abroad as legitimate counterparts of their non-Soviet colleagues, frequently engage in "active measures." Unlike their free world counterparts,

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they must play two roles—their legitimate academic pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and their political activities on behalf of the Kremlin. Soviet academicians are obliged to obey instructions from bodies which plan and control Soviet "active measures" activities. Similarly, Soviet journalists often engage in "active measures" operations in addition to serving as representatives of Soviet news agencies. One KGB officer in an industrialized country used his journalistic cover to pass forgeries, as well as to publish numerous propaganda articles aimed at influencing the media of the host country.

Case Studies

The Soviet Anti-TNF Modernization Campaign in Europe. The Soviet campaign in Europe against NATO TNF modernization is a good illustration of Soviet use of "active measures." After a long and unprecedented buildup of Soviet military strength in Europe, including the deployment of new SS–20 nuclear missiles targeted on Western Europe, the NATO ministers in December 1979 decided to modernize NATO's TNF capabilities. The Soviets immediately began an ongoing, intensive campaign to develop an environment of public opinion opposed to the NATO decision. (Of course, not all opposition to the TNF modernization decision is inspired by the Soviet Union or its "active measures" activities.)

In this campaign, Soviet diplomats in European countries pressured their host governments in many ways. In one European country, the Soviet ambassador met privately with the Minister of Commerce to discuss the supply and price of oil sold by the Soviet Union to that country. During the discussion, the ambassador gave the minister a copy of Leonid Brezhnev's Berlin speech dealing with TNF. He suggested that if the host government would oppose TNF modernization, the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs might persuade the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Trade to grant more favorable oil prices.

Moscow has spurred many front groups to oppose the TNF decision through well-publicized conferences and public demonstrations. To broaden the base of the anti-TNF campaign, front groups have lobbied non-Communist participants, including antinuclear groups, pacifists, environmentalists, and others. In some cases, the activities of these broad front groups have been directed by local Communist parties. Soviets have predictably devoted the greatest resources to these activities in NATO countries where opposition to the TNF modernization decision is strongest.

In the Netherlands, for example, the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) has set up its own front group—Dutch Christians for Socialism. In November 1980, the Dutch "Joint Committee—Stop the Neutron Bomb—Stop the Nuclear Armament Race," which has ties to the CPN, sponsored an international forum against nuclear arms in Amsterdam. The forum succeeded in attracting support from a variety of quarters, which the CPN is exploiting in its campaign to prevent final parliamentary approval of the TNF decision.

The Soviet Campaign Against Enhanced Radiation Weapons (ERW). The Soviets, throughout 1977 and early 1978, carried out one of their largest, most expensive, and best orchestrated "active measures" campaigns against enhanced radiation (neutron) weapons. (Again, not all opposition to the U.S. decision to produce the enhanced radiation weapon is Soviet inspired.)

This Soviet campaign has had two objectives: first, to halt deployment of ERW by NATO; second, to divide NATO, encourage criticism of the United States, and divert Western attention from the growing Soviet military buildup and its threat to Western Europe and the world.

- Phase one occurred throughout the summer of 1977. The Soviets staged an intense propaganda blitz against ERW and the United States, involving numerous demonstrations and protests by various "peace councils" and other groups. This phase culminated in a Soviet-proclaimed international "Week of Action."
- Phase two began in January 1978 with Soviet propaganda exploitation of a letter from Leonid Brezhnev to Western heads of government warning that production and deployment of ERW constituted a serious threat to detente. A barrage of similar letters from members of the Supreme Soviet went to Western parliamentarians. Soviet trade union officials forwarded parallel messages to Western labor counterparts.
- Phase three came in early 1978 with a series of Soviet-planned conferences, under different names and covers, designed to build up the momentum of anti-ERW pressure for the U.N. Special Session on Disarmament of May-June 1978. These meetings and conferences, held throughout February and March, were organized either by the World Peace Council or jointly sponsored with established and recognized independent international groups.

The Soviet campaign succeeded in complicating allied defense planning and focusing criticism on the United States. A top Hungarian Communist Party official wrote that "the political campaign against the neutron bomb was one of the most significant and successful since World War Two." The propaganda campaign did not end in 1978; it was incorporated into the anti-TNF effort. With the recent U.S. decision to proceed with ERW production, the Soviets have begun a new barrage of propaganda and related "active measures."

Soviet "Active Measures" Toward El Salvador. Complementing their overt public support for the leftist insurgency in El Salvador, the Soviets have also engaged in a global "active measures" campaign to sway public opinion. These activities include a broad range of standard techniques, including forgeries, disinformation, attempted manipulation of the press, and use of front groups. The obvious dual purpose has been to increase support for the insurgency while trying to discredit U.S. efforts to assist the Government of El Salvador.

In 1980, Salvadoran leftists met in Havana and formed the United Revolutionary Directorate (DRU), the central political and military planning organization for the insurgents. During the same period, the Salvadoran Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) was established, with Soviet and Cuban support, to represent the leftist insurgency abroad. The FDR and DRU work closely with Cubans and Soviets, but their collaboration is often covert.

The FDR also supported the establishment of Salvadoran solidarity committees in Western Europe, Latin America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. These solidarity committees have disseminated propaganda and organized meetings and demonstrations in support of the insurgents. Such committees, in cooperation with local Communist parties and leftist groups, organized some 70 demonstrations and protests between mid-January and mid-March 1981 in Western Europe, Latin America, Australia, and New Zealand.

The FDR and DRU are careful to conceal the Soviet and Cuban hand in planning and supporting their activities and seek to pass themselves off as a fully independent, indigenous Salvadoran movement. These organizations have had some success in influencing public opinion throughout Latin America and in Western Europe. The effort of the insurgents to gain legitimacy has been buttressed by intense diplomatic activity on their behalf. For example, at the February 1981 nonaligned movement meeting in New Delhi, a 30-man Cuban contingent, cooperating closely with six Soviet diplomats, pressed the conference to condemn U.S. policy in El Salvador.

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At another level, the Soviet media have published numerous distortions to erode support for U.S. policy. For example, an article in the December 30, 1980 *Pravda* falsely stated that U.S. military advisers in El Salvador were involved in punitive actions against noncombatants, including use of napalm and herbicides. In another particularly outrageous distortion, a January 1, 1981 article in the Soviet weekly *Literaturnaya Gazeta* falsely stated that the United States was preparing to implement the so-called centaur plan for "elimination" of thousands of Salvadorans.

Campaign Against the U.S.-Egyptian Relationship and the Camp David Process. In the Middle East, Moscow has waged an "active measures" campaign to weaken the U.S.-Egyptian relationship, undermine the Camp David peace process, and generally exacerbate tensions. A special feature of Middle East "active measures" activities has been the use of forgeries, including:

- A purported speech by a member of the U.S. Administration which insulted Egyptians and called for "a total change of the government and the governmental system in Egypt." This forgery, which surfaced in 1976, was the first of a series of bogus documents produced by the Soviets to complicate U.S.-Egyptian relations.
- A forged document, allegedly prepared by the Secretary of State, or one of his close associates, for the President, which used language insulting and offensive to President Sadat and other Egyptians and also to other Arab leaders, including King Khalid of Saudi Arabia. This forgery was delivered anonymously to the Egyptian Embassy in Rome in April 1977.
- A series of forged letters and U.S. Government documents, which criticized Sadat's "lack of leadership" and called for a "change of government" in Egypt. These forgeries surfaced in various locations during 1977.
- A forged dispatch, allegedly prepared by the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, which suggested that the United States had acquiesced in plans by Iran and Saudi Arabia to overthrow Sadat. This forgery was sent by mail to the Egyptian Embassy in Belgrade in August 1977.
- A forged CIA report which criticized Islamic groups as a barrier to U.S. goals in the Middle East and suggested tactics to suppress, divide, and eliminate these groups. This forgery surfaced in the January 1979 issue of the Cairo-based magazine *Al-Dawa*.
- A forged letter from U.S. Ambassador to Egypt Herman F. Eilts, which declared that, because Sadat was not prepared to serve U.S. interests, "we must repudiate him and get rid of him without hesitation." This forgery surfaced in the October 1, 1979 issue of the Syrian newspaper *Al-Ba'th*.

Conclusion

The Soviet Union continues to make extensive use of "active measures" to achieve its foreign policy objectives, to frustrate those of other countries, and to undermine leadership in many nations. On the basis of the historical record, there is every reason to believe that the Soviet leadership will continue to make heavy investments of money and manpower in meddlesome and disruptive operations around the world.

While Soviet "active measures" can be exposed, as they have often been in the past, the Soviets are becoming more sophisticated, especially in forgeries and political influence operations. Unless the targets of Soviet "active measures" take effective action to counter them, these activities will continue to trouble both industrialized and developing countries. ■

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